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Casey Says News Leaks Hurt Sources

CIA Chief Offers To Advise Media

By Eleanor Randolph
Washington Post Staff Writer

Publication of classified information by the media in recent years "has destroyed or seriously damaged intelligence sources of the highest value," Central Intelligence Agency Director William J. Casey said yesterday.

As a result, Casey, whose agency often refuses to comment on reports about its activities, said he has offered to consult with news organizations "on short notice" before they publish such accounts.

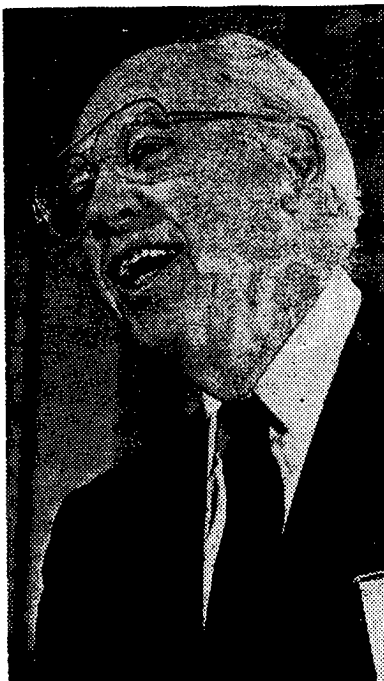
Speaking at the American Society of Newspaper Editors meeting here, Casey said reports in print and on television have "enabled those hostile to us to avoid huge investments" and to "deprive us of the ability to protect our citizens from terrorist attack."

However, Casey also told the 900 newspaper executives that, in his five years as CIA director, he has also witnessed "admirable restraint" by editors asked to withhold or limit information deemed by the government to imperil national security if made public.

He said that "the most effective way of protecting information" was to "increase discipline within the government," suggesting that the administration is studying whether new laws are needed to protect the government against employees leaking classified data.

Discussing cooperation between the media and the intelligence agencies "in the interest of the security of our country," Casey said:

"I've been gratified by the readiness of many of you to carefully consider sometimes withholding publication of information which could jeopardize the public interest or, more frequently, treating a story in a manner which meets the public need yet minimizes damage to national intelligence sources.



WILLIAM J. CASEY

... addresses newspaper editors

"The trick here is to realize the potential for damage and consult on how it might be minimized," he said. "We are always ready and available on short notice to help on that."

During the same forum, former Washington Post managing editor Howard Simons, now curator of the Neiman foundation program for journalists, talked about Washington as a "secrecy-marinated city" where journalists cannot do their jobs effectively without knowing and publishing some information that the government deems secret.

Citing one estimate that the government has classified as many as 20 million documents "secret," Simons said many of the classified papers "may not be to protect a true secret but to cover up a true embarrassment."

He added that "if actions by the CIA and the Defense Department cannot stand congressional scrutiny and public scrutiny, this nation ought not be undertaking them."

Asked later whether the CIA could act to halt operation of new civilian communications satellites, such as one that the French plan to lease for use by news and other organizations, Casey said:

"I don't think there's anything we can do about it. Anybody can go out and get any information they want."

"I expect that large news organizations will have one of those [large satellites] themselves one of these days. They do have long-range cameras, and we don't try to stop that," he said.

After the session, Casey added that if one of the satellites "tries to overfly our airspace, we might try to prevent it" but he added that, in general, "we try to live with it and we do what we can to protect our interests."